

As Built - A Work In Progress

Over a recent holiday my wife and I took a trip to her village to see her family and to finally see the house they were building, and I was financing.

Obviously, I'm not the first farang that built a house for his wife in her village knowing it will be occupied by her family while I have no expectation of moving into it myself. However, how I got involved in the process is perhaps noteworthy. It is a somewhat convoluted story, but knowing each part is necessary to paint the full picture.

My wife and I were legally married, a Thai registered marriage, two years ago. As of this date however, we have never had a Buddhist wedding ceremony. The hold-up was because the original dowry request was for B200,000, and I balked at the amount. It later was reduced to B100,000, but I was still reluctant to fork out the money. You see, my wife wasn't raised by her mother and father. She was the last of eight children, came unexpectedly some years after number seven, and was handed off to grandma the day she was born. Grandma was too elderly to keep up with her after four years, so she was pawned off to two older brothers living in Bangkok. Grandma is now dead, so I told my wife if I owed anyone a dowry it was her two brothers.

The family has never made a big issue of my reluctance since I have taken the burden of supporting their little darling off their hands. In fact, I understand her two brothers are ecstatic. But because we have never had the Buddhist marriage ceremony, I have not been allowed to go to her village because the family would lose face. So I was told.

Then last fall, my wife came up with a solution. She told me her parent's house was in need of some remodeling, and if I would foot the bill it would be the same as paying a dowry. We could therefore have the marriage ceremony. Knowing that sooner or later I had to resolve the impasse, I agreed. I reasoned that at least this way

the money would be spent on a tangible object of value and not disappear on who knows what.

The project began, and as with all things with my wife, I was on a "need to know" basis. My total involvement was to dish out the money when requested. I was also told I could not go to her village and see the project until it was finished. Saving face, remember? This was of little consequence to me. I prefer to stay in Pattaya than trek down the dirt roads to her remote village anyway.

Then a couple of months ago my wife came to me humbly stating more money was needed. The original amount she said was my dowry donation had been depleted and the house was not done. Not only that, she was advised by her bother that she should confess the family decided not to rebuild the old home, which was wooden and overrun with termites, but chose to knock it down and build a new concrete home. Although her brothers were supplying all the labor, they had miscalculated the cost of the materials and were out of money with the house only 60% complete.

Her deception is probably grounds for divorce, even in Thailand, but I found it rather amusing. Whatever this house ends up costing, it is still minor compared to what my previous wives back in the USA cost me. After letting her squirm a day or two over her ruse, I agreed to go ahead and finance the remainder of the project.

The following weekend, her brothers showed up at our home in Pattaya to discuss the continuation of construction. I retired into my office. I don't speak Thai well enough to partake in serious conversations, and besides that I wasn't asked.

Occasionally I poked my head into the living room on my way to the kitchen to fetch a Pepsi, and I noticed they were busy scratching out boxes on some scrap pieces



The OLD SIAM
Furniture - Wood - Rattan - Teak
Beds - Sofas - Umbrellas
Sideboards - Side Tables
Decorative Lamps
Picture Frames

Tel/Fax: 076 249 210
Mobile: 06 682 4284
09 839 1950

21/11-12 M.4. Chaofa West Rd. T. Wichit Muang Phuket

of paper. It was obvious that, although the house was supposed to be 60% done, they were still in the planning stages. In the end, they decided my wife needed to come to the village and make some on the spot decisions. As the brothers prepared to leave, my wife announced she was going with them.

Once again, I wasn't invited, but I really didn't care. I was obviously only the bank, and my input into the project wasn't needed. Before heading for the door my wife thrust out her hand for another installment. Along with the money, I included our little point and shoot camera. "If I am financing this project, I'd at least like to know what my money is being spent on."

When my wife returned several days later she had several photos of the "hut" her family members were now living in. It was a typical country shack made by loosely nailing together the less termite infested boards from the original house. Seeing such primitive digs, I felt proud I was making such a substantial contribution to the family's wellbeing.

Next she produced a couple of photos showing the front of a concrete house under construction. I was a little dismayed by the size and quality. I had envisioned a home a bit more substantial. Having no real knowledge of the design, I accepted her happiness that they were getting a new home and left it at that.

Then the day for my trip to the village for Songkran arrived. The family now decided I had financed enough of the house to keep their "face" in the community. As we prepared to leave, my wife approached me with confession number two...

Continued Next Issue